

Nine eleven

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Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray
and to give more than either we desire or deserve:
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid
and giving us those good things
 which we are not worthy to ask
but through the merits and mediation
of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

My text today is from St Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 14 and verse 5: 'Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike.'

I am a Christian. But I must confess to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, that I love being an Anglican. Don't get me wrong: I don't want to be disrespectful of other expressions of our Christian faith: all paths ultimately lead to Rome – oops! But I want to affirm the particular joy I find in the Anglican take on making sense of the Christian life. There is much to recommend but this morning let me cite just one example embodied in Paul's text 'Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike.'

Our worship is punctuated by special days: we have recently celebrated our patronal festival, transferring St Bartholomew's Day from Wednesday 24th to Sunday 28th. There's All Saints; Christ the King; Advent Sunday; Christmas; Epiphany; Ash Wednesday; Maundy Thursday; Good Friday; and Easter Day all of which to look forward to and they only take us up to April. Our calendar is punctuated by special days and it is one view of the Christian life that we should mark such special days as a way of recollecting, of remembering, what happened and thereby deriving benefit and encouragement from the memory thereof.

The opposite view is to say every day is special. Every day is God-given. Every day God's mercies are new every morning so we shouldn't make distinctions but be pleased that each morning we can wake up to the joy of being alive and of being Children of God our Father in heaven. Well the choice is yours and I can see why we should daily appreciate the wonder of actually drawing breath and being alive and conscious of the many good gifts each day will bring. But by temperament, I admit I prefer the former idea of having special days rather than every day being special.

That said, you may guess where I want to take you on 11th September. For British speakers of English, today is the 11th day of the 9th month. For Americans, we are in the 9th month on the 11th day. Two nations divided by one language ! But 9 11, the tenth anniversary of which we are marking today has real significance and resonance for us and I should like briefly to touch on what was such a shock for us all at the time.

It was a Tuesday afternoon some time after 4.00pm. I was sitting in a Senior Management Meeting in the Head's study at Dame Alice Owen's School when news began to come in that something extraordinary was unfolding in New York. At 8.46am local time, American Airline Flight 11 had crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. At 9.03am, United Airlines Flight 175 had crashed into the South Tower. At 9.37am, American Airline Flight 77 was to crash into the Pentagon. At 10.03am United Airlines Flight 93 was to crash into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. We were shocked; the Head ended our meeting early; I went home to follow the news as it emerged. It quickly became clear that terrorists had hijacked the planes and that three of them had been used as missiles to crash into significant buildings; one was crashed into fields thereby preventing damage to Washington DC. Later, it emerged that al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden, had been responsible. Nearly 3,000 victims were killed together with all 19 hi-jackers and over 6,000 people were injured. The shock and outrage at the attack on mainland America unleashed a response the effects of which are still being felt today.

So much is history. Yesterday, a National Memorial at the site of the Twin Towers was officially opened as a tribute to those who had died. As such, it enshrines an important principle: to remember the past benefits the present and preserves the future. History is not simply a story but it is a record of what went on, of how things unfolded and of how we coped. There is much to be learnt from our history and I profoundly disagree with Ed Balls, former Secretary of State for Education in the Brown government and currently shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labour opposition who last week dismissed the newly published

memoirs of his predecessor, Alistair Darling, as simply history and that what was important was to get on with the present. Fact is the past is present with us now and to neglect it imperils our future.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

11th September, 2011

H: Sermon 24: Nine eleven

